



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 6 – 12 April 2015



8 Apr 1942 **“Flying the Hump.”** A strategic objective of Allied forces in World War II was to supply Chinese forces fighting Japan. The Allies used an overland supply route that ran from India through Burma to China, but the Japanese cut this route in early 1942. On 8 April, two



DC-3s (later purchased in huge numbers as C-47 Skytrains) transported gasoline and lubricating oil over the Himalaya Mountains from eastern India to southern China to begin World War II’s largest airlift operation. On one of the earliest missions, eight airplanes carried the fuel and oil to service the B-25 bombers from the “Doolittle Raid.” From December 1942 through the close of the operation in November 1945, the airlift delivered nearly 740,000 tons of cargo. Over half of this total was transported during the last eight months of the war. (Cockpit photo at left from *LIFE* magazine).

11 Apr 1942 The Curtiss-Wright Company unveiled its **first production C-46 Commando**. The C-46 eventually became the largest and heaviest twin-engined aircraft used by the U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF). Due to its load capacity and high-altitude performance, the AAF primarily used it in the Pacific region where it was an important factor in the success of the “Hump” airlift over the Himalayas.



11 Apr 1944 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** On 7 Dec 1941, Edward Michael was an AAF aircraft mechanic strafed at Wheeler Field. By 1944, Lt. Michael was a B-17 pilot flying in Europe.



On a mission on 11 Apr 1944, enemy fighters riddled Michael’s plane with shells. Fire in the bomb bay made an explosion possible at any moment, but the emergency bomb release did not work. Lt. Michael, badly wounded in his right leg, ordered a bail-out. Seven of the ten-man crew left the aircraft as the two pilots held it steady, but the bombardier’s parachute was damaged. Michael, co-pilot Frank Westberg, and Bombardier John Lieber each refused to take one of the last good parachutes, so all three stayed with the aircraft. Lieber found a way to manually release the weapons. The pilots dodged enemy fighters as they flew down through a cloud deck, but they broke out into enemy ground fire. Lieber tended

Michael’s wounds as Westberg and Michael took turns flying back to England at treetop level. The situation was grim as they approached an airfield in England: the landing gear, flaps, altimeter and airspeed indicator did not work, the ball turret guns and bomb bay doors were jammed downward – in short, the aircraft threatened to break apart on landing. Michael told the other two men to bail out with the remaining chutes, but again they refused.



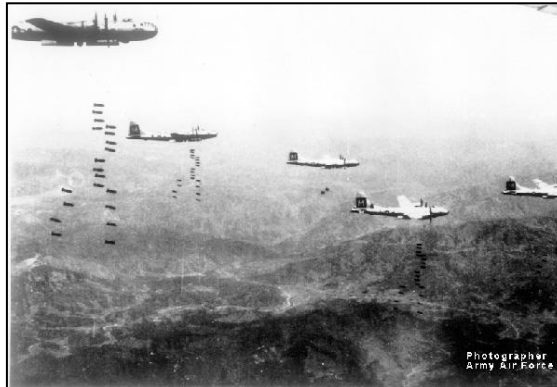
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Despite his wounds and the nearly impossible situation, Michael miraculously belly-landed the B-17, saving the lives of his fellow crewmembers. Photos and more at this [website](#).



7 Apr 1945 Twentieth Air Force launched the **first fighter-escorted B-29 raid on Japan**. The capture of Iwo Jima in February and March provided a base within fighter range of Japan and made such raids possible. Photos below from the 506th Fighter Group [website](#).



11 Apr 1966 **MEDAL OF HONOR / AIR FORCE CROSS**. A1C William Pitsenbarger (left), a pararescue jumper in Vietnam, hoisted nine soldiers to safety aboard a HH-43 Huskie and then remained behind to treat the wounded amid heavy mortar and sniper fire. Despite being hit by enemy fire, he kept treating wounded soldiers until he was fatally shot. Pitsenbarger was the first airman to receive the Air Force Cross posthumously, and his award was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Read A1C Pitsenbarger's complete story [here](#).



9 Apr 1967 Through 14 April, the 315th Air Division began the largest tactical unit move in the Vietnam War. In 351 sorties, **C-130s airlifted the entire 196th Light Infantry Brigade**, including 3,500 people and 4,000 tons of equipment, 375 miles from Tay Ninh to Chu Lai.



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10 Apr 1967 Operation POKER DICE.

Strategic Air Command completed the bed-down of bombers at U-Tapao, Thailand with the arrival of the first three B-52s. Later that same day, the U-Tapao B-52s flew their first bombing mission in the Vietnam War. B-52 combat sorties out of U-Tapao averaged three hours in duration as compared to twelve hours for Guam-based aircraft. Photo at right shows a B-52 and KC-135 at U-Tapao. The KC-135 in the photo (S/N 62-3531) is still flying with the 121st Air Refueling Wing, Ohio ANG.



7 Apr – 13 May 1972 Operation CONSTANT GUARD I. USAF deployments helped stop a full-scale North Vietnamese invasion of the South. On 7 April, the first of 200 aircraft left their CONUS bases to fly to Southeast Asia. The units were then in position to support the Operation LINEBACKER I aerial interdiction campaign against North Vietnam's Easter offensive.

12 Apr 1975 Operation EAGLE PULL. On 6 April 1975, the U.S. had begun the aerial evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which was surrounded by Khmer Rouge forces. By 11 April, some 875 Cambodians had flown to Thailand aboard USAF C-130s. On 12 April, USAF and USMC helicopters, with escorts from USAF fighters and gunships, evacuated 287 people in the final airlift from Phnom Penh. The city fell to communist forces on 17 April (photos [here](#)).

10 Apr 1994 Two F-16s struck a Bosnian Serb command post near Gorazde, Serbia after Bosnian Serbs attacked UN personnel. This was the **first close air support mission of Operation DENY FLIGHT** and the **first aerial bombing in NATO's history**.

9 Apr 1997 The **F-22 roll-out ceremony** was held at Marietta, Georgia after many years of development. Originally known as the "Advanced Tactical Fighter," the aircraft had completed a ten-year development and validation phase highlighted by the 1990 flight of a prototype model. Low rate initial production began in 2001 and full rate production in 2005.



The F-22 Raptor is an exponential leap in warfighting capabilities. Its combination of stealth, supersonic cruise, maneuverability and integrated avionics allows an F-22 pilot to kill air-to-air threats before being detected. The F-22 also has a significant capability to attack surface targets. This capability will be enhanced in the future with an upgraded radar and carriage of up to eight small diameter bombs. See the Air Force F-22 Fact Sheet [here](#).

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